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THE INDIAN JOURNALS

1859-62

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Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press

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[*Winnebago*] *Medicine Dance*

115 I met Judge Williams[97] this evening and listened among other things to a very fine description of a medicine dance among the Winnebagoes. He is District Judge of Kansas, and has held the same office in Iowa and been with the Indians for 25 years. He superintended the removal of the Sauks and Foxes etc.

He was invited by the Winnebagoes as a compliment to attend a medicine dance, or the Spirit Dance.[98] This is a religious organization which the Judge likens to our church. They initiate with forms and ceremonies each neophyte, and at that time go through with their high religious performances. The Judge says they have mesmerism

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97 a 18 [see category 116 - p210. Analyst]

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[787] and clairvoyance, and thinks they have had
them for centuries. They use a long and
[346] large lodge a [blank] prepared for the
purpose, in which all those allowed to wit-
ness the ceremonies are assembled. Adjoin-
[343] ing this house is a bark tent built in a coni-
cal form as a steam house. They excavate a
hole in the ground, heat large stones in a
fire to a great heat, and then put them in
this hole, and cover them over and seat the
initiate over them. He is then covered
around with blankets so that none of the
steam may escape, after which water is
poured on the stones and the neophyte is
[783] enveloped in a roasting steam bath. This is
[776] the first act, and the object is to steam all
evil spirits out of him.

He is then led in to the house, after the steaming process in some instances has been repeated once or twice. He is then blindfolded and led around the house. Pres-
[534] ently the singers beat the drum, shake the
rattles, and commence singing a tune; then
commences the dance, which is joined in
by all present who wish to do so. The wom-
[562] en are members of the medicine lodge as
well as the men, and they join in the songs
and in the dance. After the dancing is
done, or perhaps he may have stood in the
midst of it there is a suspension of all sing-
[756] ing and dancing. Several medicine men
then advance towards the neophyte, point-
ing their medicine bags at him, then draw-
ing them back. This advancing and reced-
ing and ejaculating certain words calculated
to work up the mind of the novitiate into a
regular phrenzy.

Presently they reach him when they hit their medicine bags against his body, he still being blindfolded and at the same time uttering a shrill exclamation. The Judge
[158] said the novitiate jumped up and fell flat on
his face as if dead and that apparently with-

796 575 158 out design. There he lay without motion or sign of life, and the dance was resumed around them. After a time he was brought out of this mesmeric or clairvoyant state, a medicine bag was put in his hands and he at once had power to strike any one down as he had been. The person who stayed by the Judge was thus struck down. He felt of his arm and wrist and found them perfectly rigid.

796 575 783 They told the Judge before they admitted him to this ceremony that while he was there he must think no evil thought. If he did, his life would be in danger from the spirits. No impure person is admitted to

[841] [843] [273] witness these ceremonies, no woman in the menstrual period, no woman pregnant or recently delivered, no intoxicated or intemperate person that is under the influence of liquor is allowed to attend. The proceedings

[756] in the sweat lodge were not seen by him as none but medicine men were allowed there.

796 575 The ceremonies commenced at 8 in the evening and lasted until day break next morning. The Judge confirms my former opinion that this is purely a religious rite, and a religious organization, having but little to do with the uses of medicine proper. The roots and herbs are one thing, but the ceremonies

[755] and incantations which are the real remedies are quite another. They call it the Spirit Dance, or the Divine Dance. The

[171] Judge informs me that he has witnessed the same thing among the Sauks and Foxes.

[*Winnebago Burial*]

764 He also mentioned the fact that he witnessed the burial of a Winnebago some years ago. He was set upon a natural mound and house made over him, food and some personal articles laid by his side, after which the whole was covered over with earth, except a small hole or chimney was kept open

[775] from the top down into the house. When

[P. 60 (C)]

764 the Judge asked what this meant they told
775 him that it was for the spirit to pass through in going out and in.

771 He never found among them during the long period of his intercourse any evidence of sun worship, and thinks it fell far short of that in which I agree with him.

115 This morning I had a further conversation with Judge Walker, who is a regular medicine man of the Wyandottes. He says
776 the name of the Spirit of Medicine among
171 the Wyandottes is Mon-ane-tow, who is the same as the Manitou of the Ojibways etc. That this spirit of Medicine is a good spirit etc. He says that the initiations described
796 by Judge Williams are in the presence only
575 of medicine men and women. The people of the tribe are not allowed to be present. That both men and women are members, and are regularly initiated before they can become members. That no oath of secrecy is required, as the Indian knows nothing about oaths, but they initiate on the honor of the man and of the woman, choosing such only as are known to be of good character for integrity. That the Society and its pro-
[755] ceedings are secret, except these ceremonies which medicine men perform on patients for their cure.

796 Walker says that these ceremonies pro-
575 ceed upon the idea that a violent shock of
828 the nervous system, which prostrates it en-
158 tirely will also prostrate or relax the hold of the disease. They know by experience that by fasting and steaming they so arouse and excite a well person as to produce a shock which will throw him to the earth. This is done at the ceremony of initiation which Judge Williams described. It is done by nervous excitement, and Indian faith in these ceremonies, and is repeated over every initiate as a proof of the possession by medicine men of this marvellous power. He

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796 says there is no sham about this falling down
575 of the person on the floor in a swoon in the
828 manner described. That this is the precise
158 shock of the system to produce which the fasting and the steaming process is resorted to, and all the other ceremonies of the initiation, including the dance.

755 When a person is sick and incurable by
158 the simple remedies known to the Indians, and the friends become apprehensive for the life of the person, then the medicine men are called in and they go through certain ceremonies, all of which operate upon the nervous system already enfeebled and excited by disease, and tend to bring about that shock or prostration of the nervous system, which when produced is supposed also to relax the hold and power of the disease at the same time. In a word it kills the disease, or breaks the disease, or destroys
[753] the evil spirit then in the body which causes the disease, and then if there is constitutional strength enough left to raise up the body from its utter prostration, the patient recovers.

753 It would seem that they regarded the
755 nervous system or the sensitive part of our
828 nature as the seat of the disease, and addressed their remedies to the sensitive part, that is to the mind rather than to the body, to the spirit rather than to the organs of the
[171] body. The medicine system prevails very generally among our Indian races. In fact it is universal so far as we have found out the customs of the remote tribes.

755 I asked Walker about the cheats prac-
756 ticed by the medicine men upon the credulity of their patients, that is, pretending to take out of a man's back a tooth or a bone. He says that in their practice they want to make money, and the greater the feat they perform the greater the charge they make. Sometimes they charge a horse etc.

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115 97. Joseph Williams, born in Pennsylvania in 1801, served as associate justice in Iowa Territory and state. In 1857 he was appointed associate justice of Kansas Territory by President Buchanan; he served until 1861. He made his home in Ft. Scott; died in 1870. For an account of some of Williams' activities in Kansas in the fall of 1859 and 1860, see *Collections of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1915–18*, XIV, 205–6, 230; *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society, 1901–02*, VII, 402.

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.796 575 98. This is probably one of the earliest accounts of the Winnebago Medicine Dance, performed by a secret society in summer only. Its purpose is to prolong life and to cultivate certain nonmartial virtues. The Winnébago Medicine Dance is closely related to the Algonquian Midéwiwin, to the Dakota "Mystery Dance," and to the Omaha "Pebble Ceremony." See "The Ritual and Significance of the Winnebago Medicine Dance," *Journal of American Folk-Lore*, XXIV (1911): 149–208, and *The Winnebago Tribe* (Bureau of American Ethnology, 37th Annual Report, 1923), both by Dr. Paul Radin; see also "Winnebago," in *Handbook of American Indians*, edited by Hodge.

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